

EXHIBIT NO. 16DATE: 1/27/09BILL NO. SB237

January 27, 2009

**SB237: Primary seat belt**

I reject the idea of this primary seat belt bill as it seems like another example of government interference in my right to choose. As I mulled over what to say at this hearing, I wondered who and what was really behind this bill.

Since Montana:

1. does not have a motorcycle helmet law
2. currently allows drivers to use cell phones while driving
3. does not have regular vehicle inspections to ensure road worthiness
4. allows drivers to hold their pets while driving
5. is not successful at keeping multiple DUI offenders off the road
6. and (according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety) Montana is one of 13 states that has a daytime passenger vehicle speed limit on rural interstates of 75 and only one of four states where the daytime passenger vehicle speed limit on "other roads" is 70, it was unlikely to be a desire for increased public safety that led to this bill.

That brought me to money as the driving force behind it. I thought it might have been due to insurance companies who wish to protect their bottom lines by not paying large medical claims due to vehicle accidents.

I should have read the bill before putting that much thought into it, because it is obvious from the WHEREAS clauses that money is indeed the force behind this bill. It is not only the health care industry, it is also an attempt by the Federal government to strong arm the people of this State into passing this type of legislation by threatening to withhold federal funds if we don't do what they want...again.

I do support legislation to have children safely restrained, and to have seat belts available for all vehicle occupants.

However, I do not support legislation that mandates I wear a seat belt and that I can be pulled over and ticketed simply for not wearing one for the following reasons:

- According to Wikipedia, the average height for women in the US is 5'3". As of my last physical, I am barely 5'0", and shrinking a little more every year. Even with an adjustable shoulder harness at the lowest setting, a shoulder harness cuts across my collarbone right at the base of my neck. I have tried wearing the shoulder harness under my arm and behind my back, but this would constitute a violation if this law passes.

- Several years ago a friend related a story where he and his wife went into a skid on an icy road and he realized an oncoming semi was going to hit them in the passenger side. His wife was not wearing a seat belt and he was able to pull her toward him. The semi did indeed hit the passenger side door and pushed it almost to the center of the pickup. They were lucky, but had she been wearing a seat belt, she surely would have been killed or severely injured. Granted, this is the exception rather than the norm, but these things can happen.

- Unlike the instances I mentioned at the outset (such as drinking and high speeds), if I choose not to wear a seat belt, I am putting only myself at risk.
- Current boating regulations require there be age and size appropriate life vests for all occupants, but do not require all adults in the boat to wear a life vest. Motorcyclists are not required to wear helmets, or even to have them available for passengers. Adult occupants in a car/pickup should have the same right to make decisions about their safety.
- Pulling over, ticketing, and fining someone who is operating their vehicle in an otherwise safe manner is a waste of resources, borders on harassment, and can create a hazardous situation on the side of the road. I hope the law enforcement officers have better things to do than look at every vehicle to verify that all occupants are wearing their seat belt properly.
- Should a driver be pulled over and ticketed if a passenger happens to remove their seat belt to reach for something just at the moment an officer sees them?
- As I read Sections 4 and 5, seat belts would not be required of occupants in buses or if all available seat belts are already utilized by other occupants. Why doesn't this bill include all occupants in all vehicles? What about passengers riding in the beds of pickups? They are completely vulnerable.
- The FFY2009 Traffic Safety Problem Identification report published by the Montana Department of Transportation is a document that presents a lot of good statistical data and valuable information. In addition to the data on seat belts and injury severity, a couple of items stood out.
  - Fatal crashes occur mostly on rural roads, where there are higher speeds than in urban crashes. (page 16)
  - In 2007 the economic loss for Montana crashes was \$662 million. Loss resulting from alcohol related crashes was \$178 million. (page 17)
  - People that drive in a manner that tends to result in fatalities are often under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, are speeding or are involved in other hazardous driving. (page 33)

There isn't much I can do or say about the Federal influence here, other than to say I resent their tactics. But on a State level, we should focus on reducing the number of accidents rather than focusing on the results of accidents. If we successfully reduce the number of accidents, a reduction in medical costs should follow.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

*Cindy Swank*  
Cindy Swank

*6670 Sleeping Giant View*  
*Helena, MT 59602*